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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the 9-year (1985-1993) evolution of a Tennessee state-sponsored university educational policy research center at the University of Memphis. A recent (1990-1993) restructuring of the unit is summarized within the context of a college-wide reorganization that had important implications for academic, research, and service units of the institution. This restructuring included the addition of various advisory groups to improve communication between the Center and the academic units of the college. The current mission and organizational structure are also described. Research supported by the Center is expected to reflect the following: (1) the potential for contributing to the solution of educational policy/practice issues; (2) applied research and development foci; (3) involvement of interdisciplinary research teams; (4) use of multiple modes of inquiry; (5) involvement of partnerships and collaborations with schools and other organizations; (6) incorporation of both immediate and long-range planning; and (7) provision for the establishment of data bases to foster secondary analyses. An appendix contains a list of the Center's major projects. A list of 1993-94 Center projects in urban studies, professional studies, educational assessment and performance, and collaborative action research is attached. (GLR)

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The Center for Research in Educational Policy: Development and Status

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The Center for Research in Educational Policy
College of Education

November 22, 1993

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The University of Memphis

The University of Memphis is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action University. It is committed to education of a non-racially identifiable student body.

This paper describes the evolution of a state-sponsored university research center over a nine-year period: 1985 - 1993. A recent restructuring of the unit is summarized within the context of a college-wide reorganization that had important implications for academic, research, and service units of the institution. The current mission and organizational structure are described, and major projects are listed in the appendix.

Creation and Development of the Center: 1985 - 1989

The Center for Research in Educational Policy, The University of Memphis, was created in 1985 as the Center of Excellence in Teacher Education. Funded by the Tennessee Legislature, the unit was the sixth Center of Excellence to be located at the University. During the first three years, the mission was to develop and evaluate innovative internship-based teacher educational programs. Following a review of productivity by external consultants in 1988, the unit was designated as an accomplished Center.

In January 1989, an application to restructure the Center was submitted. Rationale for the restructured unit was that the State of Tennessee should support university-based research responsive to the needs of educational practitioners and policy makers. The application to restructure was approved and fiscal year 1989-90 identified as a transition year in which a revised research agenda would be formulated. In the restructure proposal, four broad topics were identified as comprising a tentative research agenda: personnel development and evaluation, performance assessment, organization and management, and forecasting needs. Further articulation of the agenda was to occur during the transition year; implementation of the fully articulated agenda would occur when the restructured Center became operational as the Center for Research in Educational Policy in

1990-91.

The establishment of a university-based policy center in Tennessee at this time was consistent with development occurring in other states. By June 1990, there were 18 such centers, only 4 of which had been in existence prior to 1986 (McCarthy, 1990). Piele (1989) noted that the growth of these centers was "one of the most remarkable trends in the field of education policy in the 1980s" (p. iii). Creation of such centers resulted from several related developments: school reform legislation of the 1980s, shift of educational policy from the federal to the state level, and state leaders' recognition that reform initiatives had out-stripped state capacity to assess their impact and financial consequences (McCarthy, 1990). State leaders also recognized that limited resources were being targeted for educational policy analyses and evaluation studies.

Several recent developments on university campuses also supported the creation of policy-oriented research centers. These included graduate programs for preparing policy analysts as specialized scholars who could bridge the gap between researchers and policy makers, development of educational policy studies in schools of education, incorporation of the policy sciences into various fields of study, and higher education's interest in assisting decision makers, communities and the nation in dealing with social problems.

The Restructured Center: 1990-1993

The restructured Center for Research in Educational Policy became functional in 1990-91 and sought to develop and implement inquiries on topics that (a) held potential for contributing to educational decision making in Tennessee and the nation, (b) reflected state or national concern as educational policy and practice issues, and (c) had potential for external funding. Nine categories of studies were to be addressed: (a) collaborations and partner-

ships, (b) educational technology, (c) factors associated with at-risk learners, (d) reform initiatives, (e) site-based decision making, (f) school funding issues, (g) school manpower needs, (h) teacher development and performance, and (i) transition from school to work.

The new mission necessitated the enlistment of faculty, to provide leadership, and professional staff, to plan and initiate inquiries addressing the issues on the research agenda. Also required were a new management structure and formation of external advisory groups. Research coordination was accomplished through a council of faculty team leaders; overall management was provided by the Associate Dean for Research and Service. The nine leaders were to keep abreast of current literature; identify and become familiar with ongoing projects in the College and elsewhere relating to the respective research area; encourage and support faculty and student participation in research; plan and implement new research initiatives; and assist in determining effective use of resources to support the Center's mission of conducting research responsive to national, regional, and state educational issues.

In 1991-92, the initial research agenda was modified following an assessment of faculty interests, research productivity, effectiveness of team leaders, and potential for future projects. Four major research areas were identified as priority areas comprising the agenda: (a) factors associated with at-risk learners, (b) school-based decision making and management, (c) teacher development and performance, and (d) learning environment interventions (formerly designated school reform issues). Other topics on the initial agenda, as well as investigations of other emergent educational issues affecting policy and practice, were supported on a project or study basis. These four major areas comprised the research agenda through the 1992-93 school year as the College

of Education proceeded with its planning for reorganization.

Advisory Groups

Part of the plan for restructuring the Center was the creation of advisory groups to serve several purposes: review Center activities; provide linkages with other research agencies, policymakers, and educational practitioners; and make recommendations for future research. A Research Advisory Council was formed in 1989 consisting of six nationally prominent authorities in education. This council was to meet annually to review Center activities and recommend research priorities. A Policy Research Liaison Committee comprised of persons representing constituencies within the state was established in 1990-91. Members of this group were to provide linkages between the research community and consumers of Center research in Tennessee. Both advisory groups remain active in 1993-94. A third advisory group has now been created. This council will be discussed later.

Reorganization of the College

A plan was developed for reorganizing the College of Education effective July 1993. As part of the restructuring, all units were assessed in relation to the research, service, and instructional priorities of the College and the University. An important goal of the reorganization was to create units reflecting an organizational culture that would support the research mission of the College. Several elements of the restructuring facilitated institutionalization of the Center as a responsive research entity within the College. A renewed college-wide emphasis on teacher education, use of cutting-edge technology, presence of several contemporary program models in teacher preparation, and the practical implications of recent educational policy decisions for teacher education curriculum are examples of programmatic develop-

ments providing areas of inquiry for Center sponsorship. As a result of these developments, Center researchers have established close working relationships with the Office of Teacher Education and with academic units in planning and conducting research and evaluative studies in teacher education. Restated emphases on urban communities and cultural diversity in all academic units have enhanced opportunities for the Center to support research focusing on the problems of urban schools and multicultural issues.

Another feature of the reorganization directly impacting the Center's role and its relationship to the College was the creation of a Development Office and a Division of Research and Development. For coordination purposes, the Center has been placed in this Division along with other research and service units.

An important development associated with the restructuring of the College was the designation of physical space for the Center. Center staff, research assistants, archives, and equipment are now housed together in one location. The Center is now a place as well as an organization.

Center for Research in Educational Policy: 1993-94

Several developments in the Center were associated with the College reorganization. These will be briefly summarized.

A clarification of the mission for the Center was sought in light of the revised mission of the College and the University's goals and priorities. The Center's primary role, as outlined in the proposal developed in 1989, is to develop and implement a research agenda with primary emphasis on the resolution of issues associated with policies and practices in the public schools of Tennessee and the nation. While acknowledging that numerous difficulties are associated with relating university-based research to the complex social, economic, and political processes of

educational policy and practice, the Center remains committed to fulfilling its mission through a series of investigations conducted by Center personnel, affiliated faculty, and graduate students. Research outcomes produced through these inquiries are intended to provide a knowledge base for use by educational practitioners and policy makers. These studies seek to describe the complexities of educational phenomena and offer recommendations for action. The resulting conceptual framework should enable decisions to be made with greater insight and understanding.

In keeping with this basic mission, the Center was conceptualized during the College's reorganization as an important mechanism for mobilizing both University and community resources to address educational problems and to meet the College's commitment to the primary and secondary schools. By collaborating with school and community leaders in identifying critical issues needing resolution, the College seeks to contribute to decision making affecting school quality. Towards this end, Center research is designed to enhance the knowledge bases utilized by the various disciplines within the College and also by primary and secondary schools.

As mentioned earlier, a faculty advisory group was created in order to improve communications between the Center and the academic units of the College. Comprised of elected faculty, this council serves as an advisory group to Center staff; develops policy recommendations relative to the research mission of the College and University; and performs related duties. The group became functional during the fall semester of 1993. At that time, the Policy Research Liaison Committee was restructured in order to improve communications within the State and expand representation of state and local constituencies. This group meets twice during the academic year. Membership of the original Research Advisory Council was also reviewed and a decision

made to restructure this group. Recommendations for new members to serve on the Council have been made to University officials and State Board of Regents staff. This group is scheduled to meet early in the 1993 spring semester.

Extended discussions were held during 1992-93 with Center staff and faculty-researchers to clarify the norms and standards appropriate for directing the research agenda of the Center and involving faculty and students in Center activities. An outcome of the discussions was clarification of the Center's culture, i.e., the manner in which the organization seeks to perform tasks and accomplish goals. Research supported by the Center is expected to reflect the following:

- *have potential for contributing to the solution of educational policy/practice issues,*
- *have applied research and development foci,*
- *involve interdisciplinary research teams,*
- *use multiple modes of inquiry,*
- *involve partnerships and collaborations with schools and other organizations,*
- *incorporate both immediate and long-range planning, and*
- *provide for the establishment of data bases to foster secondary analyses.*

Collectively, these characteristics reflect a conception of policy research offered by numerous scholars (Brewer & deLeon, 1983; Majchrzak, 1984). Important emphases include a problem orientation, use of multimethod strategies, contextuality (recognition of organizational settings), concern for human values, and responsiveness to study users. A goal during the 1993-94 academic year is further clarification of the characteristics and varieties of policy-oriented research appropriate for Center sponsorship and distribution of guidelines to encourage faculty to propose inquiries to address problems in need of resolution. Developing clear conceptions of what is meant by policy research should also facilitate decision making and planning relative to use of Center

resources.

A new graduate research course developed as part of the restructuring of graduate majors in the College may also complement the Center's role and function. The course is designed to develop understandings and competencies of students interested in policy research and deal with a variety of inquiry strategies that hold promise for addressing problems of educational policy and practice. A major focus of the course will be empirico-inductive research methods and their use in policy-oriented inquiry. Doctoral students with research skills and interest in policy studies will be provided opportunities to affiliate with Center-sponsored research activities.

Modifications in the organizational structure for the Center also resulted as part of the restructuring of the College and its units. Positions of Director and Associate Directors of Research were created to provide for Center management and coordination of research activities. These three directors have responsibilities for managing a reformulated research agenda (see appendix) focusing on three broad categories of inquires: Urban Studies, Professional Studies, and Educational Assessment and Performance. Other studies are maintained at a project or study level. Three full-time support staff members provide technical assistance for Center projects. Their specializations are communications, computer programming, quantitative and qualitative data analyses, and research design. At least one staff person serves on each major research team.

A fourth category of inquiry being initiated on a pilot basis during the 1993-94 academic year is Collaborative Action Research. Projects within this category involve school practitioners and university personnel and seek to improve teaching and learning in the schools as well as contribute to the improvement of teacher education and applied research theory and practice.

Center support assists College leaders and teachers in developing the teachers' research competencies which are viewed as an integral component of professional practice. Most collaborative action research projects planned for 1993-94 involve Professional Development Schools. These schools are participating in a school-university partnership designed to improve professional practices of pre- and in-service teachers and facilitate school renewal.

The Collaborative Action Research projects are framed on a professional practice model utilizing collegial deliberations focusing on theory, research goals and objectives, research design, and assessment of outcomes. College faculty and students are used primarily as experts and facilitators. The projects are viewed as practical and emancipatory, providing both school practitioners and university personnel with awareness of the constraints impacting teaching and learning. Projects are also expected to address school problems or issues and yield results that can be directly applied within school sites.

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Center for Research in Educational Policy 1993-94 Projects: Urban Studies

"Success For All" Research and Development

1) "Success For All": Memphis Project
2) "Success For All": Regional Sites
3) "Reading Recovery" and "Success For All": Idaho Studies
4) "Success For All": Neverstreaming Project

Senior Citizens Mentoring Program

"Sing, Spell, Read, and Write" Project - Memphis City Schools

"Time to Read" Evaluation

Memphis City Schools Optional Schools Evaluation

Alabama School Finance Disparity Remediation

Cooperative Learning Evaluation - Memphis City Schools

Multicultural Education Evaluation - Ft. Wayne, IN

Assessment of Multicultural Ethics and Literacy Project - Memphis City Schools

Education Assessment: Orange Mound Community

Educational Technology Assessment - Memphis City Schools

Center for Research in Educational Policy 1993-94 Projects: Professional Studies

Professional Development School (PDS) Projects

1) Teacher Empowerment and Educational Renewal in PDS Sites
2) Becoming a Professional Development School: A Case Study
3) Case Studies of Teacher Development in a Professional Development School
4) In the Voices of Teachers: University Liaisons' Development in a PDS Site
5) Role Perceptions in a PDS Site
6) What Will You Let Me Do? Empowering Practice Teachers

Comprehensive Study of Teacher Education Programs: The University of Memphis

1) Development of a System for Maintaining and Analyzing Student Journals
2) Perceptions and Professional Behavior during Student Teaching
3) Comparative Study of Pre-service Teacher Skill Development
4) Congruent and Divergent Validity of the PPT Questionnaire
5) Changes in Student Teacher Perceptions of Good Teaching Practices

Teacher Education Follow-up Projects

1) Tennessee Teacher Education Follow-up Survey
2) Arkansas Teacher Education Follow-up Survey
3) A Validity Study of the Teacher Education Follow-up Study Questionnaire

Study of Initial Preparation and Reclaiming of Minority Teacher Education Candidates

Assessment of Total Quality Management

Center for Research in Educational Policy 1993-94 Projects: Educational Assessment and Performance

PATS Project Research and Evaluation Components

Longitudinal Assessment of an Educational Intervention in a Rural System

Relationships between School Climate, Program Participation, and Organizational Level

Relationships between School Climate, Student Characteristics, and Achievement

Modeling Educational Environment, Student Achievement, and Self-concepts

Value-added Assessment and Effective Schools: A Relational Study

School Climate Audits

School Climate Assessment

Reliability and Validity of Revised Scales for Assessing School Learning Environments

Assessment of Transportation Staff Training and Management, Shelby County Schools

Center for Research in Educational Policy 1993-94 Projects: Collaborative Action Research

Action Research Projects in PDS Schools

1) Kindergartners and Reading: Alternative Curriculum Development
2) Inclusion: Implication for Classroom Teachers
3) A Community of Neighbors: Multicultural Literacy Learning

Assessment of Counseling Outcomes in Sharpe Elementary School

Center for Research in Educational Policy 1993-94 Projects: Urban Partnership

Memphis Center for Urban Partnership (MCUP) Research and Evaluation

Assessment of the MCUP Project

Mentorship of the Young Child: Evaluation of "Wings"

Improving Learning Environments

Field Testing Models of School Productivity

Junior Achievement of Greater Memphis, Inc., Programs and Activities

Volunteers in the Schools

Saturation Mentoring

Each One Reach Three

Student Connections

College Awareness

Summer College Institute

Collaborative Learning Teams

Memphis Academy for Educational Excellence

Partnership of Postsecondary Institutions

Teen Parenting

School Health Improvement

Brooks Art Academy A-B-C Program